



ADMINISTRATIVE CONFERENCE OF THE UNITED STATES

## Clarifying Statutory Access to Judicial Review of Agency Action

### Committee on Judicial Review

#### Proposed Recommendation | June 17, 2021

1 Judicial review of federal administrative action is governed by numerous statutes,<sup>1</sup>  
2 including two general statutes, the Administrative Procedure Act (APA) and the Hobbs Act,<sup>2</sup> and  
3 hundreds of agency-specific statutes. The APA’s judicial review provisions govern judicial  
4 review of agency action generally and provide default rules that apply in the absence of any more  
5 specifically applicable rules.<sup>3</sup> Agency-specific statutes (referred to herein as “specific judicial  
6 review statutes”) govern judicial review of actions of particular agencies (often, of particular  
7 actions of particular agencies) and may provide specifically applicable rules that displace the  
8 general provisions of the APA.<sup>4</sup> Certain procedural aspects of judicial review are governed by  
9 federal court rules that specify how to file a petition for review, the content of the record on  
10 review, and other matters.<sup>5</sup>

11 The Administrative Conference of the United States undertook an initiative to identify  
12 and review all statutory provisions in the *United States Code* governing judicial review of federal  
13 agency rules and adjudicative orders.<sup>6</sup> In the course of this initiative, the Conference observed

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<sup>1</sup> Judicial review is also governed by judicially developed doctrines. See generally John F. Duffy, *Administrative Common Law in Judicial Review*, 77 TEX. L. REV. 113 (1998).

<sup>2</sup> 28 U.S.C. §§ 2341–2351.

<sup>3</sup> 5 U.S.C. §§ 701–706.

<sup>4</sup> See 5 U.S.C. § 559, which provides that a “[s]ubsequent statute may not be held to supersede or modify . . . chapter 7 [of the APA] . . . except to the extent that it does so expressly.”

<sup>5</sup> See FED. R. APP. P. 15–20.

<sup>6</sup> See JONATHAN R. SIEGEL, ADMIN. CONF. OF THE U.S., SOURCEBOOK OF FEDERAL JUDICIAL REVIEW STATUTES (draft Mar. 17, 2021).



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14 various ways in which some of these statutes create unnecessary obstacles to judicial review or  
15 overly complicate the process of judicial review. The Conference recommends eliminating these  
16 obstacles and complications in order to promote efficiency and fairness and to reduce  
17 unnecessary litigation.<sup>7</sup>

18 This Recommendation is divided into two sections. The first section (Recommendations  
19 1–3) recommends a set of drafting principles for Congress when it writes new or amended  
20 specific judicial review statutes. The second section (Recommendation 4) recommends the  
21 passage of a general judicial review statute (referred to below as “the general statute”) that would  
22 cure problems in existing judicial review statutes. The specific topics covered in the  
23 Recommendations are described below.

### **Specifying the Time Within Which to Seek Review**

24 Judicial review statutes typically specify the time within which a party may seek judicial  
25 review. The Conference’s review revealed two problems that some such statutes cause. First,  
26 some specific judicial review statutes specify the time limit using an unusual formulation that  
27 results in a time period one day shorter than might be expected. In cases involving these statutes,  
28 some parties have lost their right to review because they sought review one day late. Such  
29 denials of review serve no substantial policy interest.<sup>8</sup> Accordingly, Recommendation 1 provides  
30 that Congress, when specifying the time within which to seek judicial review of agency action,

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<sup>7</sup> This Recommendation is not intended to address all issues related to access to judicial review. For example, it does not address the time of accrual of a right of action under the general statute of limitations in 28 U.S.C. § 2401(a) (*see, e.g.*, *Wind River Mining Corp. v. United States*, 946 F.2d 710 (9th Cir. 1991)); the extent to which judicial review remains available after the expiration of a time period specified in a special statute authorizing pre-enforcement review of agency rules (*see, e.g.*, *PDR Network, LLC v. Carlton & Harris Chiropractic, Inc.*, 139 S. Ct. 2051 (2019)); the application of judge-made issue-exhaustion requirements in curtailing judicial review (*see, e.g.*, *Carr v. Saul*, 141 S. Ct. 1352 (2021)); or whether Congress should specify where judicial review should be sought with regard to agency actions that are not currently the subject of any specific judicial review statute (*see* 5 U.S.C. § 703 (providing that review of such actions may be sought using “any applicable form of legal action . . . in a court of competent jurisdiction”). The Conference has addressed some of these issues in past recommendations. *See, e.g.*, Admin. Conf. of the U.S., Recommendation 82-7, *Judicial Review of Rules in Enforcement Proceedings*, 47 Fed. Reg. 58208 (Dec. 30, 1982); Admin. Conf. of the U.S., Recommendation 75-3, *The Choice of Forum for Judicial Review of Administrative Action*, 40 Fed. Reg. 27926 (July 2, 1975).

<sup>8</sup> SIEGEL, *supra* note 6, at 24–28.



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31 should use one of the usual forms of words and avoid the unusual forms.<sup>9</sup> Recommendation 4(a)  
32 provides that Congress should include in the recommended general judicial review statute a  
33 provision that would add one day to the review period whenever a specific judicial review statute  
34 uses one of the unusual forms, thus saving certain cases from dismissal.

35 The other problem relating to time limits is that some specific judicial review statutes do  
36 not clearly specify the event that starts the time within which to seek review. In particular, some  
37 specific judicial review statutes provide that the time for seeking review of an agency rule begins  
38 when the rule is “issued” or “prescribed,” which has led to litigation about exactly what event  
39 constitutes the “issu[ance]” of a rule.<sup>10</sup> Recommendation 2 provides as a general matter that  
40 Congress should clearly specify what event starts the time for seeking review of agency action.  
41 Recommendation 2 also provides that in drafting specific judicial review statutes providing for  
42 review of an agency rule, Congress should provide that the time for review runs from the rule’s  
43 publication in the *Federal Register*. Recommendation 4(b) provides that Congress should include  
44 in the general statute a provision that whenever a time period for seeking judicial review begins  
45 upon the issuance of a rule, the time starts when the rule is published in the *Federal Register*.<sup>11</sup>

### **Specifying the Name and Content of the Document by Which Review is Sought**

46 When review is to be sought in a court of appeals, most specific judicial review statutes  
47 provide that review should be sought by filing either a “petition for review” or a “notice of  
48 appeal.” The term “petition for review” is more appropriate, as the term “appeal” suggests an  
49 appellate court’s review of a decision by a lower court.<sup>12</sup> Recommendation 3 therefore provides  
50 that specific judicial review statutes should direct parties to seek review in a court of appeals by

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<sup>9</sup> The recommended forms conform to those recommended by the drafting manuals of each house of Congress. See U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, HOUSE LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL’S MANUAL ON DRAFTING STYLE 57 (1995); U.S. SENATE, OFFICE OF THE LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL, LEGISLATIVE DRAFTING MANUAL 81–82 (1997).

<sup>10</sup> *Id.* at 28–29.

<sup>11</sup> If the relevant judicial review statute is silent with regard to computing or extending the time within which to seek review, the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure and the Federal Rules of Appellate Procedure apply. See FED. R. CIV. P. 6; FED. R. APP. P. 26.

<sup>12</sup> SIEGEL, *supra* note 6, at 34–36.



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51 filing a petition for review. Problems sometimes arise when a party incorrectly titles the  
52 document. In most such cases, the reviewing court treats the incorrect form as the correct one,  
53 but occasional decisions refuse to save a party who has given the document the wrong name.  
54 Parties should not lose their right to review by filing an incorrectly styled document.<sup>13</sup>  
55 Recommendation 4(c) proposes to solve this problem consistent with the Recommendation's  
56 preference for "petitions for review" in courts of appeals.

57 Recommendation 3 also provides that when review is to be sought in district court,  
58 Congress should provide that it be initiated by filing a complaint. District court litigators are  
59 accustomed to initiating proceedings with a complaint, and courts are also accustomed to this  
60 terminology because the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure contemplate the initiation of an action  
61 with the filing of a complaint.<sup>14</sup> Statutes calling for review to be initiated in district court by  
62 filing some other document, such as a petition for review or notice of appeal, might be  
63 confusing. Recommendation 4(d) proposes a cure for this problem that is consistent with the  
64 Recommendation's preference for "complaints" in district courts.

65 Most specific judicial review statutes do not prescribe the content of the document used  
66 to initiate review. This salutary practice allows the content of the document to be determined by  
67 rules of court, such as Federal Rule of Appellate Procedure 15, which contains only minimal  
68 requirements. A few unusual specific judicial review statutes prescribe the content of the petition  
69 for review in more detail. These requirements unnecessarily complicate judicial review.<sup>15</sup>  
70 Recommendation 3 reminds Congress that specific judicial review statutes need not specify the  
71 required content of a petition for review and that Congress may allow the content to be governed  
72 by the applicable rules of court. Recommendation 4(e) provides that Congress should include in  
73 the general statute a provision generally allowing documents initiating judicial review to comply  
74 either with an applicable specific judicial review statute or an applicable rule of court.

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<sup>13</sup> *Id.*

<sup>14</sup> FED. R. CIV. P. 3.

<sup>15</sup> SIEGEL, *supra* note 6, at 36–37.



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### **Jurisdiction to Hear the Case**

75           The Conference’s review uncovered another potential difficulty. Some specific judicial  
76 review statutes provide that parties should seek review of agency action in federal courts of  
77 appeals but do not specify that these courts will have jurisdiction to hear the resulting cases. In  
78 such a case, a court of appeals might question whether it has jurisdiction to consider the petition  
79 for review.<sup>16</sup> Accordingly, Recommendation 4(f) provides that Congress should include in the  
80 general statute a provision that whenever a specific judicial review statute authorizes a party to  
81 seek judicial review of agency action in a specified court, the court will have jurisdiction to  
82 consider the resulting case.

### **Simultaneous Service Requirements**

83           Another potential problem is that some specific judicial review statutes provide that the  
84 party seeking judicial review of agency action must transmit the document initiating review to  
85 the agency “simultaneously” with filing the document. Such a provision could cause a court to  
86 question what should happen if a party seeking review serves the document initiating review on  
87 the agency, but not “simultaneously” with filing the document. Although the Conference’s  
88 review has found no cases dismissed due to such circumstances, the Conference is concerned  
89 that a court might read the statutory text as requiring it to dismiss a petition for review based on  
90 the lack of simultaneous service.<sup>17</sup> Recommendation 4(g) therefore provides that whenever a  
91 specific judicial review statute requires a party seeking judicial review to serve a copy of the  
92 document initiating review on the agency involved “simultaneously” with filing it, the service  
93 requirement is satisfied if the document is served on the agency within the number of days  
94 specified in the recommended general statute.

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<sup>16</sup> *Id.* at 32–34.

<sup>17</sup> *Id.* at 37–41.



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### **Race to the Courthouse, Revisited**

95           The Conference’s Recommendation 80-5 addressed the “race to the courthouse” problem  
96 that arises when multiple parties seek judicial review of the same agency action in different  
97 circuits.<sup>18</sup> In accordance with that recommendation, Congress provided by statute that in such  
98 cases a lottery will determine which circuit will review the agency’s action. The statute,  
99 however, provides that the lottery system applies only when an agency receives multiple  
100 petitions for review “from the persons instituting the proceedings.”<sup>19</sup> This provision has been  
101 held not to apply to petitions for review forwarded to an agency by a court clerk, as some  
102 specific judicial review statutes require. Parties invoking judicial review under such specific  
103 judicial review statutes should be entitled to the benefit of the lottery system.<sup>20</sup> Recommendation  
104 4(h) provides that Congress should amend the “race to the courthouse” statute appropriately.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

#### **Recommendations to Congress When Drafting Judicial Review Provisions**

105           1. When specifying the time within which a party may seek judicial review of agency  
106 action, Congress should provide that a party may seek review “within” or “not later than”  
107 a specified number of days after an agency action. Congress should avoid providing that  
108 a party may seek review “prior to” or “before” the day that is a specified number of days  
109 after an agency action, or “within” or “before the expiration of” a period of a specified

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<sup>18</sup> Admin. Conf. of the U.S., Recommendation 80-5, *Eliminating or Simplifying the “Race to the Courthouse” in Appeals from Agency Action*, 45 Fed. Reg. 84954 (Dec. 24, 1980).

<sup>19</sup> 28 U.S.C. § 2112(a)(1).

<sup>20</sup> SIEGEL, *supra* note 6, at 38–41.



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- 110 number of days beginning on the date of an agency’s action. Examples of the  
111 recommended forms are:
- 112 a. “A party desiring judicial review may file a petition for review within 30 days  
113 after” the agency’s action.
  - 114 b. “A party desiring judicial review may file a petition for review not later than 30  
115 days after” the agency’s action.
- 116 Examples of the forms to be avoided are:
- 117 c. “A party desiring judicial review may file a petition for review prior to [or  
118 “before”] the 30th day after” the agency’s action.
  - 119 d. “A party desiring judicial review may file a petition for review within [or “before  
120 the expiration of”] the 30-day period beginning on the date of” the agency’s  
121 action.
- 122 2. Congress should clearly specify what event starts the time for seeking review. Where the  
123 event is the promulgation, amendment, or repeal of a rule, Congress should provide that  
124 the event date is the date of the publication of the rule in the *Federal Register*.
- 125 3. When drafting a statute providing for review in a court of appeals, Congress should  
126 provide that review should be initiated by filing a petition for review. When drafting a  
127 statute providing for review in a district court, Congress should provide that review  
128 should be initiated by filing a complaint. With regard to either kind of statute, Congress  
129 should be aware that it need not specify the required content of the document initiating  
130 judicial proceedings because that matter would be governed by the applicable court rules.

### **General Judicial Review Statute**

- 131 4. Congress should enact a new general judicial review statute that includes these  
132 provisions:
- 133 a. Whenever a specific judicial review statute provides that a party may seek judicial  
134 review of an agency’s action “prior to” or “before” the day that is a specified  
135 number of days after an agency’s action, or “within” or “before the expiration of”



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- 136 a period of a specific number of days beginning on the date of an agency’s action,  
137 review may also be sought exactly that number of days after the agency’s action.
- 138 b. Whenever a specific judicial review statute provides that the event that starts the  
139 time for seeking judicial review is the promulgation, amendment, or repeal of a  
140 rule, the event date shall be the date of the publication of the rule in the *Federal*  
141 *Register*.
- 142 c. Statutes authorizing judicial review in a court of appeals by the filing of a notice  
143 of appeal will be construed as authorizing judicial review by the filing of a  
144 petition for review, and whenever a party seeking judicial review in a court of  
145 appeals styles the document initiating review as a notice of appeal, the court will  
146 treat that document as a petition for review.
- 147 d. Statutes authorizing judicial review in a district court by the filing of a notice of  
148 appeal, petition for review, or other petition will be construed as authorizing  
149 judicial review by the filing of a complaint, and whenever a party seeking judicial  
150 review in a district court styles the document initiating review as a notice of  
151 appeal, petition for review, or other petition, the court will treat that document as  
152 a complaint.
- 153 e. Whenever a specific judicial review statute specifies the required content of a  
154 document that initiates judicial review, a party may initiate review with a  
155 document that complies with the requirements of that statute or a document that  
156 complies with the applicable rules of court.
- 157 f. Whenever a specific judicial review statute provides that a party may seek judicial  
158 review of an agency action in a specified federal court, the specified federal court  
159 will have jurisdiction to hear the resulting case.
- 160 g. Whenever a specific judicial review statute requires that a party seeking review  
161 serve the document initiating review on the agency that issued the order of which  
162 review is sought “simultaneously” with filing the document, this requirement is  
163 satisfied if the document is served on the agency within a reasonable but specific  
164 number of days, such as [seven/fourteen] days.



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165 h. Congress should amend 28 U.S.C. § 2112(a)(1) by striking the phrase “, from the  
166 persons instituting the proceedings, the” and inserting “a” in its place, in both  
167 places where the phrase occurs.

Recommendation 4(h): Struck-Through Text of § 2112(a)(1) for Clarity:

(1) If within ten days after issuance of the order the agency, board, commission, or officer concerned receives, ~~from the persons instituting the proceedings, the~~ [a] petition for review with respect to proceedings in at least two courts of appeals, the agency, board, commission, or officer shall proceed in accordance with paragraph (3) of this subsection. If within ten days after the issuance of the order the agency, board, commission, or officer concerned receives, ~~from the persons instituting the proceedings, the~~ [a] petition for review with respect to proceedings in only one court of appeals, the agency, board, commission, or officer shall file the record in that court notwithstanding the institution in any other court of appeals of proceedings for review of that order. In all other cases in which proceedings have been instituted in two or more courts of appeals with respect to the same order, the agency, board, commission, or officer concerned shall file the record in the court in which proceedings with respect to the order were first instituted.

**Commented [A1]:** Note to Assembly: For Recommendation 4(h), this stricken text is provided for clarity and convenience. It is not included in line numbering and will not appear in the final recommendation.